New Fiction

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direction save athletics. Her religion became neither high nor low, but remained a splendid possibility." None the less Eton is still a microcosm of the ruling elements in England; a curious affair of contrasts that are perhaps more apparent than real; of snobbery and prejudice and equally of lofty aspiration and of liberty under the law.

Mr. Leslie's story is likely to stand as the most comprehensive picture of Eton in literature; it certainly has no rival in anything as yet offered. And, as he exclaims, "Whatever betide her, *esto perpetua!*" An England without its Eton is unthinkable.

THE ROAD TO THE WORLD. By Webb Waldron. The Century Company.

THE title of this is well chosen. It is another case of the attempt of the young man to bring himself up, to find his way out of adolescence into the grownup way of the world. It starts the child in "Eden" (Pennsylvania) and leaves him sitting on a park bench in Madison Square at 2 o'clock A. M. meditating, after the manner of the budding author-hero, upon the Farragut monument, the Metropolitan tower clock, and the fact that, as he remarks when the policeman moves him on, "here was the city."

His adventures on the way to this goal are pretty well managed; much the usual youthful troubles, complicated and aggravated by the fact that Stan was naturally somewhat timid; high strung but a little cowardly. He is, in particular, very much afraid of the human girl. Several specimens make a good deal of trouble for him, but finally leave him very much where he began in his quest for a way into life. He suffers from what might be called an ingrowing innocence; quite willing, even eager, to be naughty, but remaining inefficiently so. It is, on the whole, a subtly drawn study of a not very unusual type of boy.

Majestic historical figures intrude upon the narrative, which brings poor Stan, at the age of thirteen, into the awful whirl of Bryan's first free silver campaign. He is emphatically a Bryanite, willing for martyrdom even in that glorious cause. The scenery throughout, from Bryanism to the University (Michigan), the West, the Spanish war, rural Pennsylvania and Madison Square—and intermediate points—is very good.

When Stan took to writing his family, not unnaturally, remained brutally unenthusiastic. The path to glory never did run smooth for this type of genius, and so far as the story is completed he has still to "arrive," though, of course, it is plain that he is duly scheduled to get there eventually. It is a moderately successful presentation of a familiar theme, though one finds it hard to take the hero quite so seriously as he himself desires to be taken.

CHILDREN OF TRANSGRESSION. By G. Vere Tyler. Henry Holt & Co.

THERE is a quality about Mrs. Tyler's story that may honestly be called Elizabethan—a strength, sincerity and directness of passion that is not quite of our own day. It is almost necessary to go back to the tremendous "night pieces" of John Webster to find anything comparable in effect; if Webster had been of our time this is the kind of novel he might have written. It is built of gross, raw, elemental material but always splendidly handled. Much of it is repulsive, abhorrent, but it is always real and it is always managed with entire dignity. There is no ranting, and there is no sly, leering salacity such as mars most modern attempts to write of such matters.

It is a keen, distressing book; tear starting in its pathos, and moving deeply in its grimmer tragedy. If it flattens out a little at the end that, too, is not altogether a forced result, but remains possibly realistic enough. It is not a mere concession to the conventional but is a logically permissible aftermath of the lurid passages that precede it.

The center of the book is the age old theme, of the woman who has "sinned," and whose punishment is inexorable—a hard, grim demonstration of the saying that "the wages of sin is death," at least in the view of the older creeds. As a protest against this hardness we have the declaration of one of the characters, which summarizes the author's thesis:

"A woman is a woman even as a man is a man, with a right to live cheerfully, no matter what she has done or what has happened to her. Law and order must be obeyed; I don't deny that . . . but there comes a time when the individual must rise superior to both, when if he has broken one and dispelled the other, he must not let it dispel or break him. . . . We are all children of transgression. Who shall hold you responsible? . . . Isn't life of more importance than our mistakes? Should we allow a mistake, never mind what it is, to overshadow the blessed gift of life?"

The story is placed in Virginia, in our own day, among people who may seem to the more "emancipated" Northerner somewhat primitive, old fashioned in their beliefs as well as in their ways of living. But one may feel sure that Mrs. Tyler knows the society she is describing. It would be comforting to think that she has exaggerated it a little, but there is no good reason for the belief. There is a touch of the "Scarlet Letter" in the attitude of the community toward the woman, George's mother, with whom the story opens. It is more than social ostracism. The church spurns her, and will not even allow her to come into their "house of God" though she is willing to sit with the negroes. Even the doctor is afraid to be seen in attendance upon her! The whole thing is a ghastly survival of all that was hardest and most inhuman in the stern creeds of our greatgrandfathers; a sardonic commentary upon what certain still existing churches are pleased to call Christianity.

Her handsome son, George, grows up in this atmosphere of bitterness, to a remarkable beauty and vigor of manhood. At length he conceives the idea of "revenging" his ill-treated mother, vicariously, in the person of Ruby, the daughter of the originally offending house. He sets about it deliberately—"his mind was made up to the performance of an act so black in its intent that he himself stood appalled by it—appalled, but calm and cold-blooded as the murderer who knows that he intends to kill." Ruby falls a victim to the "spell" of him, with the intended disastrous results.

Thereafter naturally follow repentance, the need of atonement, further contrary vengeances and punishment—a fearful series of tragic scenes, ending with enough killing to clear the stage in truly Websterian completeness, leaving practically no one but Ruby and her real lover to strive toward a better future.

Such an outline may give the reader a wholly wrong idea; there is nothing strained or unreally melodramatic or overdone about the book. It is a theme that in less efficient hands would have been disastrous, even grotesque in effect. But Mrs. Tyler has sufficient dramatic control and dignity to keep it always to a high level. It can scarcely be called a "healing" book, as its solution is too Websterian for a full "purgation" of the emotion, but it is, surely, one of the most powerful novels of the day.

THE SCARLET X. By Harvey Wickham. Edward J. Clode.

IT is rather a pity that Mr. Wickham thought it necessary to cart along so many ladies in his adventuring to the fantastic tropical island where the terrifying "scarlet X" flourished, and where an exceedingly fat villain had a lair in an inaccessible mountain fastness. He and the other villains are really quite good villians; even a little out of the ordinary. The detective, euphoniously called Ferris McClue, and the she detective who tags along will pass muster. But the assorted heroines clutter things up badly. They are constantly getting under foot, in the way of what might have been a gaudy yarn.

There are no less than three, to say nothing of the chaperon. It is of course a pleasant variation to find so much observance of the proprieties as her presence implies, but she is too feeble minded to be amusing and merely cumbers the ground or, at first, the yacht. In fact, you can take your choice of heroines, though it doesn't matter much which you pick as the leading lady.

A mislaid father serves, in part, to start things going; an otherwise entirely insignificant and useless article, who existed merely that he might get himself lost, strayed or stolen. His daughter, not being quite satisfied that he is sufficiently dead, goes off on a hunt for him on board her lover's yacht and takes along, for no apparent reason except to make a story, a considerable party of male and female friends, including the aforesaid New York detective. McClue at last finds himself a long, long way from Broadway in a very uncomfortable position for any urban sleuth. But there's a whole lot for him to detect, with plenty of incidental scrapping, hairbreadth escape and marvels too numerous to catalogue. The story is an amusing fantasia—that ought to have been better than it is with the material at hand.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS. By Charles J. Dutton. Dodd, Mead & Co.

MR. DUTTON is in the vanguard of the novelists who are inevitably destined to take up the troubles due to prohibition. We must look for a flood of bootlegger literature in due time, with especial attention to smuggling, "rum running" and all the assortment of crime that may be expected as a part of the universal uplift. Prof. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has just announced that under prohibition the United States can never produce any really great literature and has warned us that the coming generation will be cut off from Shakespeare and Swift, to say nothing of the egregiously bibulous stories of Dickens, because, as he says, "the total abstainer is, in the nature of things, imperfectly equipped for high literature." But we shall have our hooch novels in spite of him.

It will not do to betray the plot of this very well made detective story so far as to tell just what part the liquor problems play in it. That would spoil the story for the expectantly thirsty reader. It is a good, clean story, with abundant entertainment for the not too critical devotee of mystery. Its movement is not impeded by any "fine writing" or any needless subtlety of character drawing, but Mr. Dutton does give an unusually clear impression of his scenery, of a real feeling for the country and of the people moving in it.

The machinery of it is not unfamiliar: our old and valued friend the superdetective, with country police and ordinary "cops" in abundance to ferret out the answer to a pretty well conceived crime puzzle. The suspense is well maintained, and there is even a touch of originality in the choice of a criminal, whose identity must be learned from the book itself. It is a good piece of literary artisanship, with perhaps a little more than that in its style.

MAKI. By R. J. Minney. Dodd, Mead & Co.

ASIDE from its unusual interest as a definitely individualized series of pictures of modern Indian life, the story of the unhappy adventures of Maki is almost a curiosity of literature in its singular contrasts. They are not always artistically pleasing, but they are quite out of the ordinary. We are told that the writer is a Calcutta journalist, and hence familiar with the life he is describing—at least from the outside. In that part of his work he is a realist of no small capacity. His scenery is highly colored, but one must accept it as apparently accurate. It is, no doubt, a somewhat more than photographically correct presentation of the various aspects of native life in Calcutta as a European may see them—a European, however, who is really behind the scenes, looking on from the wings instead of being wholly outside the performance.

But the framework of the plot, until it nears completion, is sensational enough to remind one of the once popular (and well nigh interminable) screen serial "The Perils of Pauline." Maki has a distressingly hard time of it from start to finish; chiefly because of her extraordinary beauty. Her marriage was delayed much beyond the usual age, but she came to her degenerate husband absolutely ignorant of life, with no education, no experience, and even no real information as to realities. She is, moreover, not entirely a normal Hindu girl. In fact, her boy husband and his family consider her insane. She jumps from a fifth story window to kill herself, but her fall is broken en route downward by a woman who reaches out for her and succeeds in stripping off her one garment, so that she falls, undraped, into the waiting arms of a conveniently expectant Sikh. Such a tumble might be possible, but it calls for a good deal of faith. She is returned to her father as unsatisfactory; she runs away, and thereafter undergoes an astonishing series of educational adventures with several lovers, until she finally finds a home with one of them whom she genuinely adores. But it doesn't last, and when he goes philandering after a younger girl she leaves him. She then mutilates herself to destroy her fatal beauty, blinds herself and becomes a hopeless beggar.

Such an outline, however, is not an adequate statement of the book, for Mr. Minney manages to keep it to a fairly high level despite its sensational events. In fact, the last part of the book rises to effective tragedy, for the most part kept well in hand, savage, but real enough to make one shudder. Here he does not overdo it, and throughout, although his situations are bizarre, he never rants. It is a grewsome performance.

He handles his subsidiary people very well indeed, and the cast of characters is large. They are more satisfyingly human than the girl herself. She may be real—no one but an experienced Hindu sage could decide with any authority—but she sometimes has a shadowy quality, a touch of the emotions and thoughts that belong to the West rather than to the Oriental, though one hesitates to say that it is anything more than a restatement of the fact that the essential human woman does not greatly differ in her Occidental and Oriental manifestations. As a story the thing moves steadily and compels attention.

DANCERS IN THE DARK. By Dorothy Speare. George H. Doran Company.

MISS SPEARE renders a double service in this very noteworthy novel: she has written an extremely interesting, readable story, much above the average in technique, in the fineness of its style and the mechanism of its plot; and she has also provided much solid food for thought, both for those among the rising generation who are capable of thought, and for intelligent parents and older folk who are concerned with the *morale* of the times. It is a thoughtful book; honestly reasoned, clear headed, critical, but very far from being feebly pessimistic, although the author fully realizes the gravity of the wrongnesses she is considering. One is sure that she is giving a faithful picture; she knows the young folk she is dissecting—knows them and does not despair of their future. It is a wholesome, clarifying study; sympathetic but judicial. It leaves you with the belief that the children will eventually dig themselves out of the morass even though they are mud spattered.

The story, as a story, is much like many others current to-day; an affair of young romance, love, misunderstandings, incidental vice and mistakes, but it is all told quietly, with dignity, and—even more unusual—its conventionally happy ending is not really conventional, but a natural outcome that is not cloying and is not trite; not at all like the commonplace chords at the end of a cheap bit of music. It carries with it a word of hope, a word that is especially needed by the perplexed older generation who are tried almost beyond endurance by the antics of the youngsters now coming upon the stage. It helps one to a better understanding—and to do that is no small accomplishment. Miss Speare is an artist. She never trots out a smart or picturesque phrase, just on

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